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ABSTRACT

This teaching guide suggests practical ideas for encouraging creative talent in preschool children. It is part of a series of similar guides developed by the RAPYHT Project (Retrieval and Acceleration of Promising Young Handicapped and Talented) for educating young gifted/talented handicapped children and gifted children with no handicaps. The guide focuses on both subjective and objective forms (process and product) of creativity, and offers suggestions and activities for developing a classroom atmosphere which encourages such creativity. A list of characteristics which indicate that a child is learning in a creative way, or expressing exceptional creativity, is followed by suggestions on how a teacher can foster a creative atmosphere in the classroom. A description of classroom equipment for creative learning is included. The final section presents specific goal areas and classroom activities to increase creative learning and production. The following goal areas are established: (1) increasing productive uses of fantasy and creations; (2) increasing story telling skills; (3) increasing expressive elaboration; (4) increasing production of original or unusual ideas; (5) increasing fluent production of ideas; and (6) increasing flexibility in thinking. An annotated list of resources is provided. (CM)

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Nurturing Creative Talent In Early Childhood

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RAPYHT: A Model Program for Retrieval and Acceleration of Promising Young Handicapped and Talented

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It is our hope that the suggestions in this manual will help teachers more effectively nurture talent among their charges and in addition, will motivate them to develop other activities for fostering talent.

Merle B. Karnes, Director, RAPYHT Project
Paula Sabatino Strong, Teacher

FOREWORD

In the Fall of 1975 the Institute for Child Behavior and Development at the University of Illinois received a grant from the Federal Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (BEH) to develop and demonstrate a model program for the "Retrieval and Acceleration of Promising Young Handicapped and Talented" (RAPYHT). Children from three to five years of age were included in the project, which has completed the last year of a three-year demonstration cycle and is entering into the first year of outreach funding.

The principle goal of this project has been to develop and demonstrate an approach for educating young gifted talented handicapped children who are enrolled in programs that also serve gifted children with no handicaps, average children with no handicaps and multi-handicapped children who are of higher but not gifted ability. Since there are relatively small numbers of gifted handicapped children in any population, the approach has been to educate them in the mainstream, but, at the same time, provide them with special programming to meet the unique needs associated with giftedness and talent.

A major outcome of this three-year demonstration project has been the completion of a set of printed materials designed to aid classroom teachers and parents who desire to identify and encourage the development of the gifts and talents of young children, including those who are handicapped. This set of materials includes guides for screening, assessing and programming for children in the areas of intellectual, academic (reading, math, science), creative, leadership, visual and performing arts (art and music), and psychomotor talent. These materials are applicable for use with young gifted/talented children as well as those who are gifted/talented with handicaps. In fact, every child has a measure of talent which may go underdeveloped unless identified and nurtured. Therefore, we are convinced that careful observation and programming in talent areas is important for all children.

We are also committed to the premise that the earlier we identify and program for talents the greater the chances that the child will fully develop his true potential. Nationwide, there have been relatively few efforts devoted to identifying and programming for young gifted/talented and even less for the gifted/talented handicapped. Hopefully, the products developed by the RAPYHT Project will create more awareness of the need identify and program for this neglected segment of our population.

Merle B. Karnes, Ed.D.
Director of RAPYHT Project

CREATIVE TALENT IN THE PRESCHOOL YEARS

Every person has creative potential. Although some children are more creative than others, most preschoolers are very creative in the ways that they explore their environment, solve problems, and interpret the world around them. This is known as subjective creativity, and refers to the process of creation (Lytton, 1971). It happens when a person combines things in a way that is new to him/her (not imitation), even if the product or process does not seem unusual or outstanding to others. Children between the ages of three and five are masters at subjective creativity. Preschool teachers need to insure that this process continues in the classroom. The more notable type of creativity is objective creativity, and refers to the product. Other people judge a product as creative when it presents a new or unusual perspective on a subject matter. This guide focuses on both forms of creativity, with the assumption that subjective creativity is necessary for objective creativity.

Most researchers and writers stress that although high intelligence helps creative ability, there is no direct correlation between intelligence and creativity, especially at the preschool level (Torrance, 1969; Guilford and Christensen, 1973; Gowan, Demos and Torrance, 1969; and Wallach and Kogan, 1965). Research also shows that creativity drops when children are around five years old (Torrance, 1969). There are many indications that this drop may be related to school entrance and demands towards conformity. However, research projects also show that creativity can be nurtured in the classroom and increased by deliberate teaching approaches (Guilford, 1975; Passow, 1977; Parnes, 1969; and Gowan, 1967). This talent guide offers activities and suggestions for developing a classroom atmosphere which encourages creativity.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN WITH CREATIVE TALENT

The following is a list of characteristics which may indicate that a child is learning in a creative way or expressing exceptional creativity.

1. The creative child has a high tolerance for chaos and ambiguity. In a situation which is not highly structured, she/he does not panic; she/he makes his/her own rules. For instance, if a teacher presented some children with seeds and equipment for planting them, but gave no directions, the creative child would organize the task independently and perhaps direct others.

2. The child has a long attention span when she/he learns creatively. She/he is not easily distracted from the task at hand, and she/he may continue with the activity after the scheduled time to quit.

3. The creative child enjoys humor. At the preschool level she/he may produce ideas which seem wild or very silly to adults.

4. The creative child has a high degree of energy. She/he uses his/her entire body in a task. For example, a preschooler may prefer to stand when producing an art piece, or she/he may use many gestures when telling a story. This total body involvement reflects the excitement the child feels during the act of creation.

5. The child makes productive use of silence and hesitation. She/he may seem to be daydreaming at times or she/he may be slower than others to answer questions.

6. She/he is both conforming or nonconforming, depending on which seems most effective towards expressing creativity. This can be annoying to a teacher, who may label the child a rebel.

7. The creative child is self-confident. She/he enjoys evaluating his/her work independently and does not rely on others to judge the goodness, badness, rightness, or wrongness of some thing or situation.

8. She/he enjoys examining things, and she/he likes to use the experimental approach to learning. Preschoolers in general enjoy this type of learning. They like to touch, smell and taste things. They prefer to manipulate objects of interest whenever possible. This is another trait which may be inconvenient or annoying to adults at times.

9. The creative child makes great use of fantasy. She/he enjoys role playing, telling stories, making up songs and drawing unusual pictures. The child seems less bound by reality, and she/he is willing to change it to suit his/her own needs when telling stories or describing objects or events.

10. The creative child is a very divergent thinker.
    a. She/he is flexible; she/he can shift from one approach to another. For example, if the child is unable to push a scooter skillfully, she/he might use the scotter as some other kind of toy, such as an imaginary machine or animal.
    b. The divergent thinker displays fluency. When presented with a problem, she/he produces many ideas.
    c. The divergent thinker produces original or unusual answers. At the preschool level, these ideas may be silly ones.

d. The divergent thinker elaborates. She/he adds many details to descriptions of things or drawings.

GENERAL METHODS TO STIMULATE CREATIVE TALENT

Teachers definitely play a large role in the atmosphere of a classroom -- whether or not it nurtures creativity. The main thing to remember is that the fostering of creativity is a deliberate process. It does not mean setting the child free to "do his/her own thing." Rather, a creative environment is a responsive one. The child must see the adult as a receptive listener, one who does not use devastating criticism of his/her actions or products. The adult is able to energize the hesitant learner and help add new dimensions to repetitious play or activities. The following are some things to remember in order to encourage a creative atmosphere.

1. Be respectful of unusual questions. If you don't know the answer, say so, and help the child find out. You might even organize a field trip or project around the question. For example, if someone asked where the garbage goes, you might take the class to the city dump.

2. Respect imaginative or unusual ideas. When you ask the child for ideas, write them down in the child's presence. Even if she/he can't read, she/he knows that adults value recorded ideas. Avoid criticizing unusual or outrageous ideas. Also, when you are recording ideas, be careful about editing. A child may be upset when his/her grammar is corrected.

3. Show the child that his/her ideas have value. If possible, follow up on the child's ideas. For example, if she/he wants to put on a play of "The Three Little Pigs," help the child organize the production of the play.

4. Provide for periods of non-evaluated practice. Encourage and allow time for imaginative role playing, telling original stories, making up songs, and making non-directed art projects.

5. Tie in evaluation with cause and consequence. Discuss and demonstrate the outcomes of various ideas, then let the child evaluate the goodness or badness himself/herself.

6. Provide materials that develop imagination and enrich imagery. Fairy tales are rich in imagery. That is why they appeal so much to preschoolers. Illustrated fact books about plants and animals can also inspire much imagination.

7. Allow for daydreaming and quiet thinking. Do not rush children from one activity to another. Don't become alarmed if a child seems to be staring into space once in a while. She/he may be deep in thought.

The questions you ask children may encourage or stifle creativity. Studies show that teachers do ask lots of questions. The following are some points to keep in mind when you ask them.

1. Ask questions that require more than yes/no answers. Ask why, how, where, etc.

2. Make your questions specific, so that the child can spend time considering the idea rather than the literal meaning of the question.

3. Avoid continually asking questions for which you have a preconceived answer. If there is some information you want to give the child, tell him/her rather than play a guessing game with questions. Concentrate

on asking questions that have no one "correct" answer. Ask questions that encourage the child to summarize and evaluate.

4. Respond to the child's questions. Remember that this may lead the discussion or activity in a new direction. Be flexible with your own planned activities.

5. In group situations ask questions, and then wait for responses. If your questions require thinking, the children must have time to do so.

6. Avoid asking questions of one specific child in a group situation. This puts social pressure on that child to respond regardless of his/her ideas (which she/he may not want to share). Also, this tells the others that they need not think about this particular question. If one child never offers ideas, watch his/her face for cues. When she/he has an idea, it will probably show, and then invite, rather than force the child to contribute.

7. Make group discussion sessions short. It is very hard for preschoolers to sit and verbalize ideas for long periods of time. You may ask questions that allow for body movement, gestures or demonstrations. For the most part, integrate your question-asking into the children's other activities.

There are also some points to keep in mind when you react to the child's responses.

1. Avoid repeating the child's comments. If the comment was not clear or loud enough, tell the child so, and ask him/her to repeat it. When an

adult constantly parrots children's responses, it says to them that the only things worth listening to are what comes out of the teacher's mouth.

2. In a group situation, allow more than one child to respond to your question.

3. React to all ideas in a positive way. Avoid evaluating. Allow and encourage the children to do this themselves. For example, after a number of ideas have been offered in a group situation, ask the children to choose the one most appropriate. "Which idea would each of you choose to solve the problem?" or "Which idea would help us find the answer?", etc.

4. Whenever possible, allow and help the child discover the correctness of his/her answers himself/herself. She/he may do this through experimentation, looking through simple fact books, organizing a field trip, etc.

5. Encourage respect for each other's ideas. Treat all answers as valid ideas and encourage children to listen to each other.

Equipment

A classroom equipped for creative learning should contain lots of "open-ended materials -- materials that are not limiting in their function. Junk items found around a home make very creative materials. These may include scraps of fabric, styrofoam containers (egg cartons, meat trays, etc.), old clothing, old tools, boxes to paint, climb in and build with, old engines or engine parts, etc.

Other sources of creative materials are local businesses and factories. Many places discard valuable junk, such as machinery parts from repair shops, old menus from restaurants, unusuable tires and inner tubes from service stations or junk yards, etc. Local department stores may discard foam chips or other packing materials. Factories may offer such things as wax from a paper cup factory, stuffing materials or wire scraps from a mattress factory, etc.

Introduce new junk materials frequently to inspire the child. Allow him/her to show you how to use the materials in unique ways.

The classroom should also contain:

- easels for painting
- a variety of art supplies
- a tub of water with sieves, watering cans, bottles and floating and sinking objects
- a carpentry bench with tools and soft wood or heavy cardboard for sawing, hammering, screwing, etc.
- a dress up area
- boxes for climbing into/onto or to make things with (these may be located outdoors)
- a nature corner with flowers, nuts, grasses, shells, pets, etc.
- "real" telephones (these may be otained on loan from a telephone company)
- a book area
- old machines to dismantel, magnets, magnifying glasses, buzzers, electric light circuits
- a sand area

Whatever materials you provide, make sure that the child is allowed to explore them freely for at least part of everyday. Encourage the child to use the materials in many different ways.

GOAL AREAS AND ACTIVITIES

This section includes specific goal areas and classroom activities to increase creative learning and production. These goal areas are not sequential and can be presented in any order.

A. To increase productive use of fantasy and creations

1. Help the child make his/her original stories into skits for classmates to act out.

2. Encourage the child to tell original stories to the class at storytime, or have the child dictate a story for an adult to read to the class.

3. Enccurage the child to sing his/her original songs to the class during music time. Help the other children learn some of the songs and include them in the class song repetoire.

4. Encourage the child to make original greeting cards for birthdays or holidays. She/he may enjoy dictating thank you's or drawing pictures for someone who has provided a service for the class or guided a field trip.

5. Have the child choose his/her favorite drawings for you to frame.

6. Encourage parents to use the child's chosen designs in embroidery or ceramics.

7. Help the child photograph his/her creations and those of others in the class. Present the photos as a slide show to the class. To sustain interest, have the children identify the artist of each creation.

8. Help the child put together a booklet which includes original stories and songs (dictated or sung to the teacher), drawings or photographs of artistic creations.

B. To increase story telling skills

1. Have the child choose a favorite storybook character. (Make cutouts of several characters for the child to choose from. You might want to mimic a voice for each character.) Have the child either tell a familiar story to that character, or make up an original story to tell.

2. Divide the children in the class into a group of actors and an audience group. Have the actors dress in costumes or wear masks and show themselves to the audience. Then have the audience tell a story for the actors to act out. To simplify the activity, you might choose one child to make up a story for the actors to act out.

3. As you tell a story with lots of sounds or actions, have the children in the class accompany with instruments. For example, if a story character knocks on a door, the children might make door knocking sounds with blocks, drums, etc.

4. Have the child tell "scribble stories." You many motivate the child by telling a story yourself first. As you make up a story, coordinate scribbling ( ) with your voice. Have the child make up his/her own stories and scribble as she/he tells them. If she/he is interested, allow him/her to illustrate a scribble story.

5. Read a story, and then present a puppet to the child as one of the story characters. Have the child ask the puppet questions about the story.

For example, in Where the Wild Things Are, the puppet might be Max. The child could ask Max, "How did you feel when you were king of all the wild things?"

C. To increase elaboration

1. Draw a simple human figure on a chalkboard or large piece of paper. Have the children in the class suggest things for you to add to the drawing or have them add details themselves. Continue adding details as a group until the drawing is very complicated.

2. Have the child dictate a story for you to write down. As she/he adds to the story, encourage him/her to include descriptive details. "What did the monkey look like? What kind of car did they ride in? How many monsters were there?" From time to time read the story to the child from the beginning. Then encourage him/her to continue adding details.

D. To increase production of original or unusual ideas

1. Studies show that when a person produces many ideas or solutions, the latter ones are usually the more unusual, original ideas. When a child offers suggestions in a situation, encourage him/her by asking "what else could you do?", etc. It's likely that his/her suggestions will become more and more unusual.

2. Present the child with a situation problem which is very open-ended. Provide concrete materials for the child to use to solve the problem or show his/her ideas. For example:

- provide flannel board figures and tell the child to show how he would stop a dog and a cat from fighting.
- provide building blocks and tell the child to make a machine for washing pigs.
- provide modeling clay and tell the child to make a cage that a monster couldn't get out of.
- provide dress up costumes and tell some children to show how they would deal with a child who hits everyone.
- if the child is skilled at drawing, have him/her draw a machine that can fly in the air and float on the water, or a machine that will take care of a baby, or the most fun machine in the world, etc.

E. To increase fluent production of ideas

1. Make a four-page booklet with a circle drawn on each page. Have the child draw something different from each circle in the booklet.

2. Hand the child an envelope with several shapes in it. Tell the child to make a picture with the shapes. After she/he has made and described the picture, tell the child to mix up the shapes and make a different picture with them.

3. Show the child a ball, a shape or some other simple design. Ask him/her to name all the things she/he can think of that look like that object or design. Encourage the child to suggest different categories of objects. For example, if she/he is naming only kinds of foods (a circle looks like an orange, a pizza, a piece of candy), tell him/her to name some things that are not food. Have him/her look around the room to get ideas.

F. To increase flexibility in thinking

When a child draws a picture of something, encourage him/her to explore the same idea with another media. For example, if the child draws a picture of a boat, ask him/her to make that same boat using blocks. If she/he draws a picture of a person, ask him/her to make that person with clay or paint. (Always consider the child's skill level before suggesting another media.) You might also have the child dictate stories or descriptions of his/her drawings for you to record.

ANNOTATED LIST OF RESOURCES

1. Gowan, J. D., Demos, G. D. & Torrance, E. P. Creativity: Its educational implications. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1969.

A book of selected writings about creativity and education. Topics include conditions for creativity, characteristics of creative individuals, creating a creative atmosphere in the classroom, and research studies done on creative performance.

2. Guildford, J. P. Factors that aid and hinder creativity. In Gowan, Demos, & Torrance, Creativity: Its educational implications. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1969.

This article introduces Guilford's hypothesis that creative individuals are greater in fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration. Each of these factors is explained in some detail. Other traits of creative people are also suggested.

3. Guilford, J. P. Varieties of creative giftedness, their measurement and development. The Gifted Child Quarterly, 1975, 19(2), 107-121.

This article emphasizes that creativity can be increased by proper treatments and explains the creativity factors of fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration. There is also a description of various creativity tests for children, some of which could be adapted for use with preschoolers.

4. Guilford, J. P. & Christensen, P. R. The one-way relation between creative potential and IQ. Journal of Creative Behavior, 1973, 7, 247-252.

In this article, the authors discuss the correlation between intelligence and creativity. Based on a study by Guilford and Hoepfner (1966), the authors conclude that although high intelligence aids creativity, a person with high intelligence is not necessarily creative, while a person with average intelligence can be very creative.

5. Khatena, J. Teaching disadvantaged preschool children to think creatively with pictures. Journal of Educational Psychology, 1971, 62(5), 384-386.

This article discusses an experiment done with 118 disadvantaged preschoolers showing that exposure to creative materials and activities over a six-day period of time increases their levels of creativity, in fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration.

6. Khatena, J. Major directions in creativity research. The Gifted Child Quarterly, 1976, 20, 336-346.

This article summarizes many research projects and writings on creativity, including theories and definitions of creativity, measurement of creativity, nurturing creativity, the handicapped and creativity, and imagination and imagery. Extensive references are included.

7. Kranyik, R. D. Stimulating creative learning in the elementary school: A sourcebook of activities. West Nyack, New York: Parker Publishing Company, 1969.

This book focuses on creative thinking as problem solving and assumes that teachers can encourage creativity by setting the necessary conditions, which are described. The book includes suggested activities in reading, art, math, science, music, physical education, and social studies. Different skill levels are indicated—only some of the activities are applicable to preschool.

8. Lytton, H. Creativity and education. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971.

This book makes a distinction between subjective creativity (the process) and objective creativity (the product). It emphasizes that although some people are more objectively creative, and thus termed "creative" by others, everyone has a degree of subjective creativity.

9. Malony, E. Creative education in the early years. Journal of Creative Behavior, 1972, 6, 23-30.

This article includes a description of a preschool classroom which is especially conducive to creativity.

10. Parnes, S. J. Education and creativity. In Gowan, Demos, and Torrance, Creativity: Its education implications. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1969.

This article focuses on studies showing how creativity can be increased through specific programs. Although not directly applicable to preschool, the theories presented are usuable for all ages.

11. Passow, A. H. Fostering creativity in the gifted child. Exceptional Children. March, 1977, 358-364.

This article emphasizes that if gifted children are to become gifted adults, their creativity must be nurtured by those who nuture their development. Research results are the basis for suggestions made to the teacher in order to facilitate creativity.

12. Renzulli, J. S. New directions in creativity. New York: Harper and Row, 1976.

This book outlines a program for creative teaching based on J. P. Guilford's Structure of Intellect Model. Activities are suggested, many of which are adaptable to the preschool level.

13. Smith, J. A. Setting conditions for creative teaching in the elementary school. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1966.

This book presents a definition of creativity as compared to productivity, talent, learning and intelligence. It offers practical suggestions for nurturing creativity in the classroom through physical set up, materials, general atmosphere, and attitudes of the teacher and administrators.

14. Strasser, B. B. The use of questions as an aspect of teacher's behavior. In Gowan, Demos and Torrance, Creativity: Its educational Implications. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1969.

This article suggests some useful points to keep in mind when asking questions which will foster creative thinking. Also included are some points to consider when reacting to children's responses.

15. Torrance, E. P. Give the Devil his blues. Gifted Child Quarterly, Winter, 1961, 5, 115-118.

This article includes practical ways for a teacher to reward creative thinking which mainly reflect an attitude of fostering creativity.

16. Torrance, E. P. Creative teaching makes a difference. In Gowan, Demos, and Torrance, Creativity: Its educational implications. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1969a.

This article suggests indications that a teacher might know when creative learning is taking place. It also suggests some possible benefits that creative teaching offers and traits of a teacher who is fostering creativity.

17. Torrance, E. P. Creativity. San Rafael, California: Dimensions Publishing Company, 1969b.

This very useful and readable book includes much research on creativity, traits of creative children, tests of creativity, and ways of encouraging creativity in the preschool and elementary classrooms.

18. Torrance, E. P. Non-test ways of identifying the creatively gifted. In Gowan, Demos, and Torrance, Creativity: Its educational implications. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1969c.

This article includes an extensive list of traits which will help teachers and parents identify creative children.

19. Wallach, M. A. & Kogan, N. Modes of thinking in young children. New York: Holt, Rheinhart and Winston, 1965.

This book includes a study on the relationship between intelligence and creativity.